



*Routledge Studies in the Fashion Industry*

# **FASHION CONSUMPTION**

**UNRAVELLING CONSUMER INSIGHTS IN  
THE FASHION INDUSTRY**

Edited by  
Cathrine V. Jansson-Boyd



# Fashion Consumption

This book offers an interdisciplinary exploration of consumer behaviour in the fashion industry and the factors driving consumer decision-making.

Divided into four key themes, international contributors at the forefront of fashion and consumer insight investigate the cultural evolution and attributes of fashion consumption, the individual characteristics of consumers that influence the purchase of fashion garments, online fashion behaviours and the emergence of second-hand shopping and sustainability on fashion choices. Chapters explore the use of fashion as an extension of self, the role of augmented reality as well as the impact that ideological shifts, such as veganism, have on fashion consumption.

This book will be an essential resource for scholars across fashion, consumer psychology and marketing. It will also appeal to students pursuing advanced courses in fashion.

**Cathrine V. Jansson-Boyd** is a consumer psychologist with over 20 years of experience conducting research to understand how consumers think and act.

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This series explores the fashion industry through an interdisciplinary lens, bringing together cutting-edge research to define and advance this growing field. We welcome proposals for original research projects that are either single or multi-authored or an edited collection from both established and emerging scholars across the globe, working across the fashion industry. Topics include, but are not limited to, marketing, retailing, brand management, sustainability and supply chain management.

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Unravelling Consumer Insights in the Fashion Industry  
*Edited by Cathrine V. Jansson-Boyd*

# Fashion Consumption

Unravelling Consumer Insights in the  
Fashion Industry

Edited by Cathrine V. Jansson-Boyd

First published 2026  
by Routledge  
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge  
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-032-98257-1 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-98259-5 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-59777-3 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003597773

Typeset in Sabon  
by Newgen Publishing UK

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# 1 Introduction

*Cathrine V. Jansson-Boyd*

Fashion can be defined as the continual change in clothing styles. It is a non-verbal language that communicates to others who we are or who we aspire to be. The clothing choices people make can influence self-esteem, confidence and mood (e.g. Alaedini & Hasannejad, 2020; Kodzoman et al., 2023; Moody et al., 2010; Panasea, 2024). Fashion also shapes cultural norms, gender roles and social environments (e.g. Braizaz, 2019; Nair, 2024; Williams, 2018), something that is explored in this book. Furthermore, fashion is important to the environment (e.g. Bick et al., 2018; Niinimäki et al., 2020), health (e.g. LaBat & Kim, 2014; Lennon & Kim, 2023), as well as social and physical well-being (e.g. Tillotson, 2009; Shafqat et al., 2023), which demonstrates how it infiltrates people's lives on a micro and macro level. This is why analysing and understanding fashion through different consumer perspectives is key, as it is otherwise impossible to get an overall understanding of how it impacts our lives.

Fashion is a multi-billion-dollar industry, meaning that it is an economic pillar in many countries. It has been estimated that over 300 million people are employed by the fashion industry, across the globe (Economics Observatory, 2025). The industry generated global revenues of \$1.7 trillion in 2021 (Fashion United, 2025), which is around 5% of all world trade. Thus, fashion is a key player in the global economy.

There is also a great deal of influence from the fashion industry on psychological and sociological constructs. This is evident in the way it shapes cultural norms, social structures, social change, individual and group identities, as well as how people express who they are. This is not just applicable to recent times but is also evident to see from a historical perspective. Just think about how social hierarchies were defined by formality and elaborate clothing design during Victorian England. The more wealth people had, the more ornate the clothing they wore (Sayer, 2002). Or how the women's suffrage movement in the late 19th century saw suffragettes reject restrictive clothing, such as corsets, for utilitarian clothing such as suits that symbolised independence (Zhu, 2022).

## 2 Fashion Consumption

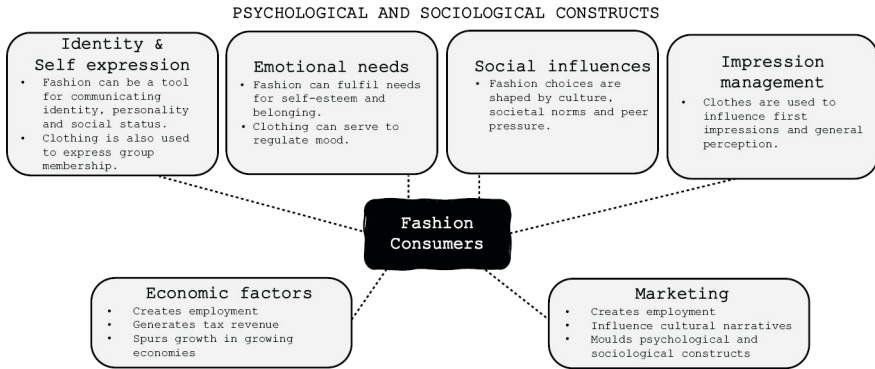


Figure 1.1 Shows the variables that influence why consumers purchase fashion items and how their consumption influences economic factors and shapes society. Effectively, the fashion consumer is like a spider in a complex web. The consumer is driven by psychological and sociological needs. How much they spend on clothing plays a significant role in influencing the global economy, in that it generates employment and tax revenue. The role of marketing is also important in that it moulds consumers' thinking.

Source: Created by author.

In modern times, marketing plays a significant role in moulding the psychology and sociology of fashion. It drives what kind of clothes people use to express who they are, as marketing campaigns often portray clothing as a tool for showcasing personality and aspirations. Bearing in mind that people are social by their very nature, we are very much influenced by what other people are wearing. Marketing leverages this through celebrity collaborations and influencer endorsements, as it is proof that wearing something is desirable and accepted by others. Marketing also has the capacity to shape broader cultural narratives as brands align themselves with social values. Just consider how Nike showed support for Black Lives Matter when they included Colin Kaepernick in their advertising campaign 'Dream Crazy' in 2018. This sparked debates about social justice and the right to publicly protest (e.g. Hoffmann et al., 2020). A simplified version of the complexity of the relationship between the fashion consumer and external and internal factors can be seen in Figure 1.1.

### Fashion Is Not Just Fun and Frivolous

To understand fashion consumption is to understand humans better. It is such an integral part of society and has been for a long time. It is difficult to know for certain when fashion began but according to some historians, it is believed to have emerged around the mid-14th century (Laver, 1969). Whilst the history of clothing itself is clearly much older, it was not about

fashion but rather about protection. At this time, there was some evidence of tailoring, which made clothing better fit the human body – something that the use of buttons also assisted with. No doubt that the 20th century has seen the most rapid evolution of fashion from one decade to the next. At the start of the 1900s, there was a distinctive S-silhouette that pushed women's chests forward and the hips back. In the following decade, this was moved away from for a softer and more natural form. The outbreak of the war meant that more than ever, there was a need for practical clothing. This was followed by an influence of jazz and glamour in the 1920s, even though clothes were often kept simple, as the war had changed what people wanted. This was also the decade that saw an increased use of sportswear for women. The following decade was influenced by a more boyish look and a great influence from Hollywood films. With the Second World War breaking out during the 40s fashion once more was focused on practicality. Presumably, the war years and the limited access to fabrics led people to wanting something more stylish in the 1950s. Just looking at the first half of the 20th century, it becomes apparent that clothes evolve very much alongside society and the present mood. Big changes, such as the clothing alterations made during the world wars, show that people adjust to world events. Thus, it is not surprising that there are also fast changes to fashion during the 21st century, as globalisation, technology and social media have changed trends, material use and manufacturing.

It is not only fashion trends that change but also the fashion sales landscape. Consumers used to be constrained to purchasing clothing in their local stores. Now, through the internet, they can buy clothing from anywhere in the world. It also used to be that it was less common with personalisation but now consumers often can alter the items they buy, perhaps by changing the colour or adding an inscription. Social media platforms, like Instagram, are a common platform for product discovery and purchase. Often, the shopper can buy clothing directly within the apps. The fact that clothes are easily accessible and alterable means that consumers' expectations are changing alongside fashion itself. This means that fashion designers need to be aware of how to best provide an overall purchase package that fits with the image of their clothing. For example, if you are designing luxury clothing, consumers will expect to buy it from online sources that reflect the product image. Consumers will also expect the product to arrive in packaging that shows it is a luxury product. It will need to be fast delivery by a company that can be trusted, as consumers expect a seamless luxury purchase experience. Thus, the fashion industry needs to consider the full package and how it communicates with the consumer.

It is puzzling that many people think of fashion as superficial. Often it is characterised as the poster-industry of consumerist materialism. But it really ought not to be. Fashion, as can be noted in Chapter 6, is often reflected by deeper motivations and aspirations. It is the heart of contemporary culture. Fashion choices are complex and often well-thought through. Even those

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who claim not to like fashion often use clothing to signal that they are ‘opting out of fashion’. This is no different from using fashion as a representation of what you stand for. Thus, it still demonstrates the significance of clothing as an integral part of people’s lives. When people have a negative stance towards fashion, it is not uncommon that they embrace second-hand fashion and encourage a circular economy. Even though this is not specifically covered in Chapter 10, you can there read about how second-hand fashion is on the increase. That gives you a better understanding of what is driving consumers to purchase second-hand clothing.

As outlined previously, albeit briefly, it has cultural and historical significance. It has been a marker of historical shifts, as can be noted through the evolution of clothing. Taken together with the social importance of fashion, it shows that it should not be frowned upon, as it plays such a significant role in understanding humans.

### **The Outline of This Book**

Understanding the fashion consumer is a complex challenge. Why is it that people have a need to follow fashion? What influences people to buy certain clothing over others? There is a myriad of explanations for questions such as these, and no book could ever cover everything that is involved in understanding the complicated world of fashion. However, this book does provide an opportunity for the reader to get insight into different aspects that can further their understanding of fashion consumption. It provides a broad perspective that enables the reader to get a holistic view of why people purchase fashion items. The book consists of four key areas, each of which focuses on aspects that are central to understanding consumers. This includes individual aspects that impact fashion decision-making, how fashion consumers act online, as well as matters that are important to fashion consumers that guide choices and manufacturing such as veganism. Each chapter is written by a specialist and thus ensuring that the best insight into the different topics is conveyed. All the chapters are structured in the same way. They start off with an introduction, and it is followed by five key chapter points that allow the reader to have a clear overview of what the chapters are about. The core content of the chapter is then set out. At the end, there is a chapter summary and five discussion questions. The questions can be used to think further about the chapter content, whether it be for teaching purposes or just for the individual reading.

The first two chapters are about cultural influences. The first chapter, Chapter 2, takes you on a tour through time that explores how different individuals have shaped fashion and society. It starts during the 19th century with a focus on how fashion was an elite domain that was influenced by social observation and ends in current times with a focus on how digital platforms make fashion participatory. This is followed by Chapter 3 that examines how fashion interacts with gender identity and social norms. It is argued that

clothing is so much more than just something appealing to look at but rather a form of cultural and psychological tool that can reinforce or challenge gender norms. Thus, it is a powerful cultural force that is intertwined with marketing messages that fosters, at least at times, undesirable messages.

The second section of this book is about individualism, and it is made up of four chapters. In the first one, Chapter 4, it explores whether overconsumption of fashion is acceptable at a time when the world is battling serious environmental issues. Should individuals shift towards being conscious consumers, whereby they engage in repair skills and the appreciation of existing garments, rather than continue to buy new clothing. The difficulty is that materialistic value orientations are commonplace, and they fuel fashion consumption. When combined with the alignment of clothing choices to social norms and the desire for approval, this makes it difficult for consumers to resist trends and buy new clothing. In Chapter 5, consumption, identity and marketing systems are explored. It outlines how fashion consumption is influenced by marketing and how this is intertwined with people's identity. It highlights how fashion can be something positive when it comes to self-enhancement and expression as well as generating a sense of belonging to groups. Additionally, the chapter flags that fashion can lead to negative self-reflection and comparison to others. Chapter 6 delves into why some individuals put up with uncomfortable dressing items such as wearing high heels. It explores the psychological and symbolic benefits of facing discomfort as a fashion choice – something that is the direct opposite of many other life choices, whereby most people do what they can to avoid discomfort and pain. The final chapter on individual differences, Chapter 7, focus on the influence of touch on consumer fashion choices. It explains how consumers can differ in their need for tactile input and how people therefore respond differently to textures. Additionally, it also explores, based on tactile input, whether people are more or less likely to purchase clothing online.

The third part of the book focuses on the digital clothing market. First, in Chapter 8, a closely scrutinized how consumers interact with the online fashion environment. It looks at the decision-making process involved in online shopping and how digital channels cater to different consumer preferences. In Chapter 9, it dives into the role of augmented reality in the fashion industry. It looks at how aspects such as virtual fitting rooms have captivated both industry professionals and consumers.

The fourth and final part of this book, *Fashion Matters*, consists of four chapters. In the first chapter of this section, Chapter 10, takes a look at second-hand fashion and the circular economy. The chapter explores how millennials are shifting in their consumer behaviour and are increasingly embracing second-hand luxury shopping. In Chapter 11, it is highlighted how ideological shifts shape the acceptance of clothing materials. Specifically, this chapter looks at veganism. The fact that the materials used are changing will also affect how our tactile sense shapes our perception of clothing. Thus, readers may wish to think about this in conjunction with what they read in

Chapter 7. Whilst not much is currently known about it, the two subjects will undoubtedly be intertwined. In the 12th and final chapter of this book, which is titled Seeing Interconnected Cycles, it is described what it means to be a conscientious fashion consumer. It explores the difficulties that come with wanting to be conscientious, especially from an environmental perspective.

All the contributors to this book hope that you will find the content stimulating and informative. Happy reading!

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Part I

# Cultural Influences



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